
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
COMMERCE
NEWS

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20230

NATIONAL
OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC
ADMINISTRATION

Contact: Delores Clark
(808) 532-6411

NOAA 03-R241
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 1, 2003

**NOAA ANNOUNCES NEW TSUNAMI BULLETINS AS STATEWIDE EXERCISE
GETS UNDERWAY**

April is Tsunami Awareness Month in Hawaii

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Richard H. Hagemeyer Pacific Tsunami Warning Center (PTWC) is testing new local tsunami warning products during a statewide tsunami exercise today. NOAA is an agency of the Commerce Department.

"There is very little warning time for local tsunamis," said Chip McCreery, PTWC director. "A local tsunami can strike the coast immediately or within minutes. Our new products have content designed for the public and for fast dissemination. We are trying to get effective, life-saving information to people along coastlines at risk as quickly as possible after a potentially tsunami producing local earthquake occurs."

Existing tsunami products were designed primarily for use by emergency managers and their tsunami advisors. They contain details regarding earthquake parameters and sea level readings in a tabular form and do not provide advice or instructions to the public. The new products contain brief general descriptions of the earthquake and tsunami and provide information regarding how the public should respond. They are in a narrative form for rapid and automatic dissemination using text-to-voice technology into the Emergency Alert System and NOAA Weather Radio.

Participating in the exercise along with NOAA's Pacific Tsunami Warning Center, International Tsunami Information Center, and National Weather Service Honolulu Forecast Office, are the U.S. Census Bureau, Hawaii state and county civil defense agencies, state and county warning points, State Department of Education, American Red Cross, Hawaii Tourism Authority, Pacific Tsunami Museum, and Civil Air Patrol.

"The statewide tsunami exercise will focus on Hawaii's ability to respond to a locally generated tsunami," said Ed Teixeira, vice director of state civil defense. "It provides an opportunity for participants to review their local tsunami response procedures and to promote preparedness."

- more -

The exercise simulates a 7.6 earthquake on the south Kona coast of the Big Island which generates a statewide tsunami. In this scenario, the coastlines of all Islands are impacted. Many harbors experience considerable wave action and strong currents. Damage to harbor facilities and boats is widely reported.

Following the exercise, a review and evaluation will be conducted by all participants. "The exercise will help us improve our tsunami warning procedures and products and be more prepared for the next real event," said McCreery. "The last local tsunami in which lives were lost occurred in 1975 near Halape on the Big Island. Almost two generations have grown up in Hawaii since then with little experience or knowledge of tsunamis. It is an educational challenge."

According to the latest data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Hawaii's population has increased more than 37 percent since 1975. "It is exciting to be participating in the first-ever statewide local tsunami drill in Hawaii and to see firsthand how federal, state and local officials use census data in their emergency preparedness and natural evacuation plans," Census Bureau Director Louis Kincannon said. "Census data greatly assists federal, state and local officials in assessing population growth along flood zones and plotting tsunami evacuation routes based on where people actually live and where they work."

"Here's what every family should do to prepare," said John Cummings, Oahu civil defense education and training officer.

- 7 Look in the white pages of the local phone books for each Island to find out if your residence or workplace is in an evacuation zone.
- 7 During a tsunami, if you are in an evacuation zone, immediately go inland or to higher ground. If you are not in an evacuation zone, stay put and do not congest the highways.
- 7 Prepare an emergency kit to last for three days or until the "all clear" is announced.
- 7 Decide on a place to meet.
- 7 Select a relative in another state as a point of contact where all family members can check in.
- 7 Never go to the coastline to watch or to surf – you cannot surf a tsunami wave.

Tsunami Awareness Month commemorates the destructive April 1, 1946, tsunami in which 159 people in Hawaii lost their lives. Activities and public events are held to promote tsunami preparedness. For a list of events, visit: <http://www.prh.noaa.gov/itic/media.htm>.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. To learn more about NOAA, visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.